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The Adriatic Question

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THE ADRIATIC QUESTION

Joint Memorandum of December 9, 1919

British-French Revised Proposals of January 14, 1920

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uary 23, 1920

President Wilson's Note of February 10, 1920

Reply of the French and British Prime Ministers of
February 17, 1920

President Wilson's Note of February 24, 1920



PRESENTED BY MR. HITCHCOCK

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THE ADRIATIC QUESTION.

[For the press.]

JOINT MEMORANDUM OF DECEMBER 9, 1919.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
February 26, 1920.

The text of the joint memorandum signed on December 9 by Premier Clemenceau for France, Sir Eyre Crowe for England, and Undersecretary Frank L. Polk for the United States reads as follows:

PARIS, December 9, 1919.

The following memoranda were signed by Clemenceau, Crowe, and myself at the close of the meeting of the Supreme Council at Quai d'Orsay this morning:

"At the moment when the Peace Conference is entering what it is hoped may be the last stage of its labors for the conclusion of peace with Germany, Austria, and Hungary, the territorial settlement still remains incomplete in respect of regions which the (?) uncertainty is calculated to effect gravely the vital interests of the countries directly involved and might easily endanger the peace of Europe and of the world.

"Being persuaded that this danger could only grow in intensity if the Peace Conference were to terminate before an agreement had been reached among the Principal Allied and Associated Powers concerning the Adriatic question, the representatives of the Conference of America, Great Britain, and France desire to call the attention of their Italian colleague to the urgent necessity of finding a solution. They realize fully the difficulties with which the Italian Government is confronted in dealing with this problem, but it is precisely for this reason that they believe that it would be unjust to all the parties concerned, and in the first place to Italy herself, were they any longer to delay putting frankly before the Italian Government a statement of the position such as they see it after many months of examination and reflection. The friends of Italy therefore feel impelled to make a further effort to reach a settlement which would be the fulfillment of her legitimate aims and aspirations with the equitable claims of the neighboring states as well as with the supreme interests of the peace of the world.

"The three representatives, accordingly, venture to invite the Italian Government to proceed to a fresh survey of the field in the light of the statement which they have now the honor to make.

"The British and French representatives have followed with earnest and sympathetic attention the negotiations which have passed between the Italian Government and the President of the United States. If they have hitherto refrained from tendering their direct advice to the Italian Government in the matter, it was because

they had hoped the Italian Government would be able to reach an agreement with President Wilson to which the British and French Governments could readily subscribe. It will be remembered that the British and French Governments have already, more particularly by their note communicated to President Wilson on September 10th, used their best efforts to promote such an agreement which the President's answer to that note gave every reason to hope could be brought about. Though a complete agreement has not so far been arrived at, the points of difference still outstanding have been so much reduced as to justify an expectation that complete accord will now be reached.

"It is well, with this view, to place on record, in the first place, the chief points on which agreement has been reached. This is all the more desirable, as it would appear from recent official Italian statements that some misapprehension may exist in regard to matters which can readily be cleared up, such, for instance, as the exact description of what is generally referred to as President Wilson's line. The points of agreement are, in the main, embodied in the American memorandum communicated to the Italian Delegation in Paris on October 27th.

"(1) With regard to Istria, President Wilson had from the first agreed to a frontier running from the Arsa River to the Karawanken Mountains, which widely overstepped the recognized ethnical line between Italy and Yugoslavia and which would have, as a result, to incorporate in Italy more than three hundred thousand Yugoslavs. Italy's geographical position, as well as her economic requirements, was held to justify this serious infringement of the ethnic principle and President Wilson, anxious to give the fullest value to these important considerations, went still further in agreeing to an extension eastward in such a way as to give to Italy the region of Albona in spite of the considerable additional number of Yugoslavs thereby incorporated.

"Moreover, to strengthen the strategic security of Italy, President Wilson, in agreement with the Italian Government, has indorsed the creation of a buffer state between Italian territory in Istria and the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom in which some two hundred thousand Yugoslavs, as against less than forty thousand Italians, will be placed under the control of the League of Nations. Anxious to remove any conceivable strategetic menace that Italy might fear from the Serb-Croat-Slovene state, President Wilson has agreed, and the British and French Governments are glad to associate themselves with this agreement, that the so-called Assling region shall be permanently demilitarized. The three representatives would be happy to learn from the Italian Government whether slight modification of the demilitarized zone between the Arsa River and Cape Promontore are deemed necessary to safeguard the security of the defenses on Italian territory.

"(2) There is complete agreement concerning the creation, in the interest of Italy, of the buffer state to be known as the (free state of Fiume?) and its control by the League of Nations. Ethnic considerations would demand that this state, containing two hundred thousand Yugoslavs, should be afforded an opportunity by plebiscite to decide its own fate. In deference to Italy's objection that the incorporation of this region in the Serb-Croat-Slovene state by

free act of the inhabitants might create a real menace, it is now agreed that the determination of the whole future of the state shall be left to the League of Nations, which, in conformity with Italian requirements, shall not fail to provide the full measure of autonomy which the city of Fiume enjoyed under Austro-Hungarian rule.

"(3) The three representatives are glad to record their appreciation of the wisdom and moderation which have marked the attitude of the Italian Government towards the difficult question of Dalmatia. They feel that the Italian Government have acted on an enlightened view of their higher interests in officially withdrawing territorial claims to an area where, to enforce them, would have meant permanent discord with the inhabitants of the Serb-Croat-Slovene state and prevented all possibility of friendly relations with them. In order, however, to safeguard every Italian racial and sentimental interest it has been agreed that the city of Zara shall enjoy a special régime. Its geographical position indicates Zara as a part of the Yugoslavs state, but, provided the town is left within the Yugoslavs customs union, it is to be given complete sovereignty under the League of Nations and freedom to control its own affairs.

"(4) The same wisdom and moderation as that which had marked the attitude of the Italian Government towards the Dalmatian question have characterized their attitude as regards the islands in the Adriatic. The Italian Government appears to be at one with President Wilson in realizing the necessary racial, geographic, and political connection of the Dalmatian coastal islands with the Yugoslav state. On the other hand, the possession of certain outlying islands, though ethnically Yugoslav and economically connected with Yugoslavia, are considered by the Italian Government necessary to Italy's strategic control of the Adriatic and the reasonableness of this claim has been accepted. The following islands being accorded to Italy on a demilitarized status, namely: (a) The Pelagosa group, (b) Lissa and the small islands west of it, (c) Lussin and Unie. These islands are to pass in full sovereignty to Italy who, on her part, is to make an agreement with the Slav population of Lissa providing for their complete local autonomy.

"(5) Italy is to receive a mandate for the administration of the independent state of Albania under the League of Nations. Attached to the present memorandum is an outline of the form which, in the opinion of the three representatives, such a mandate should take. The frontiers of Albania on the north and east at present will be those fixed by the London conference in 1913; the southern frontier is still a matter for negotiation. In order, however, not to delay a general settlement by such negotiations, the following provisional arrangement could be adopted: Greece shall occupy the territory west and south of a demarcation line which shall run as follows (reference one million two hundred thousand Austrian staff map): from Mount Tumba on the northern boundary of Greece northward along the crest of the Nemercha Ridge to the Vojusa River, thence down that river to Teleleni, Mirica to point 98, thence south, passing between the villages of Lopsi-Martolozit and Zemblan, thence through points 1840 and 1225 to a point about two miles south by east 1225, thence westward passing just north of Poljana, thence southeast to point 1669, thence west and northwest to point 2025, thence southward to the coast just south of Asphyonruga. The triangle of

territory from point 98 on the Vojusa River, between Baba and Sinanaj, northeastward to Lake Malik and southward to the Greek frontier and the demarcation line mentioned above should be the subject of later negotiation between the three Allied representatives on the one hand and Italy and Greece on the other, the three Allied representatives acting for Albania.

"(6) The city of Valonia, together with such Hinterland as may be strictly necessary to its defense and economic development, is to be granted to Italy in full sovereignty.

"The above six points in their general aspect are those on which, after many months' negotiation, the Italy Government have happily reached an agreement with the President of the United States. They afford to Italy full satisfaction of her historic national aspirations, based on the desire to unite the Italian race; they give her the absolute strategic control of the Adriatic; they offer her complete guard against constitutional guarantees against whatever aggressions she might fear in the future from her Yugoslav neighbors, an aggression which the three representatives on their part consider as most improbable if the lines of a just and lasting settlement are reached. They have even carried their concern for Italian security to the point of neutralizing the Dalmatian Islands and adjacent waters from the northern border of the Ragusa region to Fiume. The three representatives therefore venture very earnestly to urge on the Italian Government in the most friendly spirit that they should reflect on the great advantages which the above settlement following on that which gave to Italy the frontiers of the Alps would bring her and the great moral and material triumph with which its successful conclusions would now provide the Italian Government.

"Anxious, however, to give the most sympathetic consideration to every Italian interest or sentiment, the three representatives have carefully examined in all their bearings certain further demands which the Italian Government have presented under the following four heads: (A) Control by Italy of the diplomatic relations of Zara. (B) An arrangement by which the city of Fiume the so-called (*corpus separatum*) should be dissociated from the free State of Fiume and made completely independent though its port and railway should be left to the free State. (C) Direct connection of the city of Fiume (with the?) Italian province of Istria by the annexation to Italy of a long narrow strip of territory running along the coast from Fiume to Volosca between the railway and the sea, the Italian frontier in Istria being pushed eastwards so as to include the whole peninsula within Italy. (D) Annexation to Italy of the Island of Lagosta.

"With regard to the first point, the representation of Zara, there ought to be no difficulty in satisfying the national Italian demand that this small historic Italian town shall preserve the Italian character both in its internal administration and in its representation abroad. It is already conceded that (beyond such connection with Yugoslavia as Zara shall have by its incorporation in the Serb-Croat-Slovene customs union) the city shall be completely independent under the League of Nations. The city will therefore be entirely free to decide, subject to the approval of the League of Nations, how it shall be diplomatically represented abroad. If, as is contended, the city is completely Italian, its choice will naturally be made in accordance

with the Italian claims; and it is hoped that in this way entire satisfaction will be given to the desire of the Italian Government. The Italian proposal to withdraw the city of Fiume, except its port, from the free state is one which has been found seriously perplexing. The main object of the creation of a buffer state between Italy and Yugoslavia was precisely to guarantee on the one hand Italian strategic security and on the other the prosperity and development of Fiume. It is not understood how it would be possible for the so-called buffer state to exist without Fiume and still less how it would be possible for Fiume to exist except within the buffer state. Fiume and the buffer state are absolutely dependent one on the other, and any arrangement which removed Fiume from the buffer state would put an end to the prosperity alike of the city and of its Hinterland. Mindful of the sentimental feeling aroused in Italy by the question of Fiume, the three representatives have always believed that a practicable plan could be devised whereby the city of Fiume within the buffer state should enjoy a privileged position. With this object in view they propose for Fiume precisely the same degree of autonomy as the city had under Austro-Hungarian rule. It is believed that this provision and the watchful and sympathetic interest of the League of Nations will guarantee to Italy full protection for the Italian ethnic and cultural elements at Fiume. With absolute sovereignty vested in the League of Nations and with Italy represented in the council of the League every Italian interest will be fully safeguarded. Moreover, to separate Fiume from the buffer state could not fail to lead to a protest against the very establishment of such a buffer state, which under such conditions would be inhabited entirely by Yugoslavs. With respect to the new Italian proposal for the annexation to Italy of a long narrow strip of coast from Fisona to the gates of the city of Amann there are difficulties of a practical nature. The reason for which the Italian Government have made this demand is stated to be a purely sentimental one—namely, the desire that the city of Fiume should not be separated from Italy by any intervening foreign country. No doubt such a sentimental reason may be of great importance in the eyes of the Italian Government, but it would appear to rest on a misapprehension of the real position of Fiume. The creation of the buffer state—which is to be completely independent of Yugoslavia—was, among other reasons, probably intended to safeguard the position of Fiume; and the free state, of which Fiume must, as indicated in the preceding paragraph, form an essential part, is already in direct contact with the Kingdom of Italy, not only by sea but by a long land frontier of approximately a hundred miles. Full effect, therefore, is already given to the sentimental considerations to which the Italian Government attach so much value. In fact, the new Italian plan would not achieve this object so well, as in practice it is to be feared that it would be quite unworkable. The Italian Government does not propose to interfere with the railway connecting Fiume with the north, which they admit is to remain within the free state. This railway runs for a considerable distance along coast; and the Italian proposal amounts, so far as this region is concerned, to cutting off from the free state and incorporating with Italy the line of sandy and barren beach intervening between the railway and the sea. Whilst the injury to the free state, which would in this eccentric way be entirely cut off from its only seaboard, is obvious

and unmeasurable, it is not easy to understand what would be the benefit to Italy unless it be considered a benefit to her that the free state should be so crippled. Nor does it seem necessary to dwell on the extraordinary complexities that would arise as regards customs control, coast-guard services, and cognate matters in a territory of such unusual configuration.

"The plan appears to run counter to every consideration of geography, economics and territorial convenience, and it may perhaps be assumed that if these considerations were overlooked by the Italian Government this was due to their having connected it in their mind with the question of annexing to Italy all that remains of the Yugo-Slav portion of the peninsula of Istria.

"This question of further annexation of Yugo-Slav territory is raised quite unambiguously both by the demand for the whole of Istria and by the proposal to annex the Island of Lagosta. In neither case do even considerations of strategy arise, for the strategical command of the Adriatic is already completely assured to Italy by the possession of Trieste, Pola, the islands facing Fiume, Pelagos, and Valona. Additional security is afforded by the proposed demilitarization of the whole free State of Fiume together with a large zone lying to the north of it and of the small portion of Istria remaining to the free (*) of Fiume.

"Economic consideration being equally excluded there remains nothing but a desire for further territory. Now the territories coveted are admittedly inhabited by Yugo-Slavs. They contain practically no Italian elements. This being so it is necessary to refer to the way in which President Wilson, with the cordial approval of Great Britain and France, has met every successive Italian demand for the absorption in Italy of territories inhabited by peoples not Italian and not in favor of being absorbed. On this point the following passage may be quoted from a telegram addressed to Signor Tittoni by the Secretary of State at Washington on November 12:

"Your excellency can not fail to recognize that the attitude of the American Government throughout the negotiations has been one of sincere sympathy for Italy and of an earnest desire to meet her demands. Italy claimed a frontier on the Brenner Pass and the demand was granted in order to assure to Italy the greatest possible protection on her northern front although it involved annexing to Italy a considerable region populated by alien inhabitants. Italy demanded further a strong geographic eastern frontier and this likewise was granted in order to assure her abundant protection although it involved incorporation with Italian boundaries of further territory populated by Alien inhabitants. Italy demands the redemption of her brothers under foreign Sovereignty and every effort was made to meet this wish even in certain cases where, by so doing, much greater numbers of foreign races were brought within Italian Sovereignty. Italy demanded complete naval control of the Adriatic and this was granted by according her the three keys of the Adriatic: Pola, Valona, and a central Island base. When all this failed to satisfy Italian claims there was added concession to concession at Sextan Valley, at Tarvis, at Albona, in the Lussin Islands, in the terms of the Fiume free state and elsewhere. In our desire to deal generously, even more than generously, we yielded Italy's demand for an Italian mandate over Albania, always hoping to meet from Italy's statesmen a generous response to our efforts at conciliation."

"To the considerations thus urged by Mr. Lansing the three representatives desire to add another argument. In doing so they trust the Italian Government will not credit them with any desire to give advice on questions of Italian high policy on which the Italian Government will rightly claim to be the best judge. But an appeal to an historical argument may be permitted to the representatives of three countries to whom the liberation of Italian territories from foreign domination has been a matter of unwavering concern and sympathy through generations of noble and often terrible struggles. Modern Italy won the place in the hearts of all liberty loving peoples which she has never since lost by the pure spirit of her patriotism, which set before her people the generous aim of uniting under the Italian flag those extensive provinces formerly within the ancient Italian boundaries, which were and have remained essentially Italian territories in virtue of their compact Italian population. The sympathies of the world have accompanied Italy's advance to the outer borders of Italia Irredenta, in pursuit of the sacred principle, the self-determination of the peoples. This principle is now invoked by other nations. Not invariably is it possible owing to the complicated interaction of racial, geographical, economic and strategical factors to do complete justice to the ethnic principle. Small isolated communities surrendered and outnumbered by populations of different race can not in most cases be attached to the territory of their own nation from which they are effectively separated. But the broad principle remains that it is neither just nor expedient to annex as the spoils of war territories inhabited by an alien race, anxious and capable to maintain a separate national state of irredentism exactly analogous in kind to that which justified the demand of Italia Irredenta for union with the Italian State.

"The three representatives venture with all deference to express the opinion that in declining to agree to the incorporation of more Yugo-Slav territory they are acting in the highest interest of the Italian nation itself.

"From this point of view the inclusion in Italy of purely Yugo-Slav territories where neither security nor geographical or economical considerations compel annexation is not in itself a commendable policy. It would be bound to create within the Italian borders a compact body.

"The three representatives would make an earnest appeal to the Italian Government to seize the present most favorable of opportunities for arriving at a friendly agreement with them for the immediate conclusion and permanent guarantee of the definite settlement on lines which they venture to think fully realize all the legitimate national aspirations of Italy, and fully safeguard her preeminent position in the Adriatic. A settlement based on the foundations which Italy, in conjunction with her Allies, could thereby lay would have given a means of reconciling interest at present divergent and of offering Italy an opportunity for rendering more cordial and solid her relations with the new nations, who are her neighbors, and to whom she could furnish such valuable assistance and economic support as her resources and experience entitle her to offer.

"The spirit of moderation which was characterized in the recent attitude of the Italian Government leads the three representatives to hope that this appeal from Italy's American, British, and French

Allies will not pass unheeded and that the Italian Government will, by assuring definite agreement with their Allies, place on firm foundations the great moral and material triumphs to which Italy's efforts and sacrifices throughout the war have so justly entitled her."

"The United States, British, and French Governments desire to recognize the independence of the Albanian State. They consider that the State of Albania will require, to the extent indicated in paragraph 4 of Article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations, 'The Administrative advice and assistance' of one of the Great Powers. For this task Italy, by her geographical situation and economic capacity, is primarily indicated.

"The United States, British, and French Governments are anxious therefore, to entrust to Italy a mandate over the state of Albania under the conditions implied in the covenant of the League of Nations. They consider that these conditions should form the basis of Italy's acceptance of this mandate and should be in a convention to be concluded between the Italian Government and the Governments of the principal Allied and Associated Powers. The headings of such a convention would be the following:

"One. Albania is recognized as an independent State within the frontiers indicated in the body of the covering memorandum.

"Nothing in these stipulations shall, however, prevent the Albanian State from negotiating with the Serb-Croat-Slovene state such region rectifications as may be in accord with local ethnographic and economic requirements.

"Two. The Serb-Croat-Slovene Government shall have the right to construct and operate railways through Northern Albania north of parallel 41, degrees 15, and otherwise to enjoy full privileges of international purport across Northern Albania.

"Three. The right to control the development of the Boyana river shall be vested in the Council of the League of Nations with power to delegate the work to either Italy or the Serb-Croat-Slovene State under proper restrictions. It is assumed for this purpose that Montenegro will form part of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State.

"Four. A commission shall forthwith be established consisting of a representative of the Italian Government, a representative of the League of Nations, and a representative of the Albanian State who shall be designated by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers for the purpose of elaborating (A) the terms of the mandate to be entrusted to Italy over Albania, and (B) the organization of the future state of Albania. This commission shall terminate its labors within five months from the signature of this convention and will address a report thereon with the necessary recommendation, to the Council of the League of Nations. The final decision as to the terms of the mandate and the organization shall be made by the Council of the League, acting by a majority vote.

"Five. The Commission *foreshadowed* in the above paragraph shall base its deliberation not only on the considerations above outlined but also on the following principles:

"(A) The freedom of conscience and the free and outward exercise of all forms of worship; the complete liberty in education and linguistic matters of all the inhabitants of the State of Albania.

"(B) The organization in so far as may be compatible with the tradition of the country and the exercise of efficient administration of

legislative and administrative bodies representing all sections of the population.

"(C) The prevention of the exploitation of the country or its colonization in a manner liable to militate against the interests of the native inhabitants. Under this heading would be included any recommendations which the commission might make as to improvements in the existing system of land tenure.

"(D) The eventual creation of gendarmerie the senior officers of which may be Nationals of the mandatory power. The mandatory power shall have the right for a period of two years from the date of which the mandate is conferred and pending the organization of the native gendarmerie the request for armed forces in the country. After that period the State of Albania shall be permanently demilitarized and no power shall be allowed to maintain regular forces in the country without the sanction of the Council of the League of Nations."

BRITISH-FRENCH REVISED PROPOSALS OF JANUARY 14, 1920.

The following is a paraphrase of the text of the British-French revised proposals, as accepted by Premier Nitti and handed to the Yugoslav delegation by Premier Clemenceau on January 14:

"THE ADRIATIC QUESTION—REVISED PROPOSALS HANDED TO THE JUGOSLAV DELEGATES BY M. CLEMENCEAU ON THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 14, 1920.

"(1) There shall be an independent State, under the guarantee of the League of Nations, consisting of the corpus separatum of Fiume. The right of this independent State to choose its own diplomatic representation shall be accorded. The Serb-Croat-Slovene State shall be given the town of Susak, it being understood that the railways terminating there, together with all facilities for their development, and the whole port as well, are to be handed over and to belong to the League of Nations which will take into consideration the interests of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, Hungary, Transylvania, as well as the city itself, and will make arrangements accordingly.

"(2) The Free State (of the previous proposals) shall disappear and the boundary shall be so drawn between Italy and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State as to meet the following requirements:

"(A) To provide along the coast a connection by road within Italian territory. This, however, shall be done in such a manner as to leave within the Serb-Croat-Slovene State the whole of the railway from Fiume northward through Adelsberg. Where the railway from Fiume follows the coast, the boundary line shall lie between the railroad and the corridor joining Fiume with Italy.

"(B) A readjustment of the Wilson line in the region of Seno-sechia in order to provide for the protection of Trieste.

"(C) The boundary line to be further drawn as marked by the blue line on the map attached. This will leave in the Serb-Croat-Slovene State purely Yugoslav districts.

"3. There shall be an independent State, under the guarantee of the League of Nations, consisting of Zara, within the limits of the municipality. The right of this independent State to choose its own diplomatic representation shall be accorded.

"(4) Valona shall be retained by Italy, as provided for in the Treaty of London, and, in addition, the mandate over Albania shall be given to Italy. In northern Albania, the boundaries shall be re-adjusted as shown on the attached map. Those districts of Albania which will thus go to the Serb-Croat-Slovene State will enjoy a special régime as an autonomous province similar to that which the treaty with the Czechoslovak republic provides for its autonomous provinces. The southern boundary of Albania shall be the line which was proposed by the British and French delegations on the Commission on Greek Affairs. This leaves Greece Koritza and Argyrokastron.

"(5) There shall be assigned to Italy the following island groups: Lussin, Lissà, and Pelagosa. There shall be placed under the sovereignty of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State the remainder of the islands.

"(6) All Adriatic islands shall be demilitarized.

"(7) There shall be special provisions permitting Italians in Dalmatia to choose, without leaving the territory, Italian nationality.

"(8) Economic enterprises now existing in Dalmatia shall by an international convention have their security safeguarded."

The following is the text of the cable sent on January 19 by the Secretary of State, asking the point of view of the British and French Governments in undertaking to dispose of the Adriatic and Russian questions before ascertaining the views of the American Government:

"WASHINGTON, *January 19, 1920.*

"Please take up with Mr. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George the question of the way the Russian and the Italian problems have been handled and ascertain their point of view. The United States is being put in the position of having the matter disposed of before the American point of view can be expressed, as apparently Mr. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George have sought only the views of the Italian and Yugo-Slav Governments before ascertaining the views of the United States Government. Is it the intention of the British and French Governments in the future to dispose of the various questions pending in Europe and to communicate the results to the Government of the United States? There are features in connection with the proposed Fiume settlement which both Mr. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George must realize would not be acceptable to the President.

"As it was pointed out by Mr. Polk before his departure, the Dalmatian and other questions should be taken up through regular diplomatic channels and the fact that you are not charged with full powers could have no bearing on the question. As no American official could be sent to these gatherings that could have the same authority as the Prime Ministers of the three Governments in question, it is manifestly impossible for the United States Government to be represented at the meetings of the Prime Ministers.

(Signed)

"LANSING."

STATEMENT OF THE FRENCH AND BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS OF
JANUARY 23.

The text of the reply of the British and French Prime Ministers to the preceding cable reads as follows:

“PARIS.

“His Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador presents his compliments to His Excellency the United States Ambassador and has the honor to state that he has been charged by Mr. Lloyd-George and M. Clemenceau to hand to Mr. Wallace the enclosed telegram drawn up by Mr. Lloyd-George and M. Clemenceau before their departure. In reply to the telegram from Mr. Lansing, which Mr. Wallace handed to Mr. Lloyd-George and M. Clemenceau on the 20th instant, Lord Derby would be grateful if the telegram now enclosed could be transmitted to Mr. Lansing at the earliest opportunity.”

The telegram reads as follows:

“The French and British Prime Ministers have given their careful attention to the memorandum communicated to them by the American Ambassador in regard to the Russian and Italian negotiations. As to the Russian question, they had previously sent a statement of their views for the consideration of the United States Government inviting their consent and cooperation.

“As regards the Italian question, the absence of the United States has never been regarded by the French and British Governments as more than temporary and they have never lost sight of the American point of view on this question, on the right solution of which the future of the world so largely depends. The French, British, and Japanese Governments have never had the intention of making a definite settlement of the questions raised without obtaining the views of the American Government. They therefore took up the Adriatic question at the point at which it was left on the departure of Mr. Polk for Washington. Signor Nitti transmitted certain proposals in modification of the joint memorandum handed to Signor Scialoja by the request from the United States, France, and Great Britain on December 9th, 1919. On the assembly of the conference in Paris a fortnight ago M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George immediately resumed negotiations between the Italian Government and the representatives of Jugo-Slavia and finally arrived at what they considered an arrangement which was the best available reconciliation of the Italian and Jugo-Slav points of view. The details of this settlement are appended. The French and British Governments are glad to think that practically every important point of the joint memorandum of December 9th, 1919, remains untouched and has now been indorsed by the Prime Minister of Italy. Only two features undergo alterations, and both these alterations are to the positive advantage of Jugo-Slavia.

“1. The free state of Fiume which would have separated two hundred thousand Jugo-Slavs from their fatherland disappears. Three quarters of these people are at once and forever united with Jugo-Slavia, a source of perpetual intrigue and dispute is done away with, and if in return Jugo-Slavia has to agree to the transfer of territory to Italy including some 18,000 Jugo-Slavs in addition to those already included under the Wilson proposals. The balance is clearly to the

benefit of Jugo-Slavia. Fiume becomes an independent state under the guarantee of the League of Nations and the authority of the League of Nations over the port becomes absolute and immediate in the interests of all concerned.

"2. As regards Albania, an attempt has been made to afford satisfaction to the necessary requirements of all parties concerned. The details of the administration of this country by Jugo-Slavia, Italy, and Greece have yet to be elaborated but in working to his end, sight will not be lost of the feelings and future interests of the Albanian people and every endeavor will be made to carry out the arrangements in full consultation with them. The French and British Governments consider that the above is a fair settlement of a difficult and dangerous question and have informed Italian, Jugo-Slavs Governments that in the event of its not being accepted they will be driven to support the enforcement of the Treaty of London which is satisfactory to nobody. Had a plenipotentiary representing the United States Government been in Paris, M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George would have cordially welcomed his full cooperation in this negotiation, but in the absence of anyone who could speak on behalf of the United States and in view of the vital importance of arriving (*) the settlement of a question which has inflamed southeastern Europe for more than a year and which if it is not promptly composed, may not only impede the recuperation and reconstruction of two countries greatly exhausted by the war, but may lead to war itself. The Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain felt that no other course was open to them but to proceed to dispose as quickly as possible of difficulties between two of their allies in close and continuous consultation with both while they were all in Paris together. In doing this they have not intended to show the slightest discourtesy to the United States Government nor have they wished to conceal their action in any way from the latter. They are indeed sure that the President would not have desired them to make a settlement impossible during the necessarily short stay of the Prime Ministers in Paris by requiring every phase of the negotiations to be communicated to Washington in order to obtain his consent to the proposals when he had not heard the arguments and could not interview the principals concerned. In their judgment the only plan was to proceed with the negotiation as rapidly as possible and to submit the results to the United States Government as soon as a definite conclusion had been reached.

(Signed)

"WALLACE."

PRESIDENT WILSON'S NOTE OF FEBRUARY 10.

On February 10 there was despatched to the British and French representatives at Paris a note from President Wilson, the text of which is as follows:

"The President has carefully considered the joint telegram addressed to this Government by the French and British Prime Ministers and communicated by the American Ambassador in Paris, in regard to the negotiations on the Adriatic question. The President notes with satisfaction that the French, British, and Japanese Governments have never had the intention of proceeding to a definite settlement of this question except in consultation with the American

Government. The President was particularly happy to receive this assurance as he understood that Monsieur Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George, in agreement with Signor Nitti, had decided upon a solution of the Adriatic question which included provisions previously rejected by the American Government, and had called upon the Yugoslav representatives to accept this solution, on pain of having the Treaty of London enforced in case of rejection. The President is glad to feel that the associates of this Government would not consent to embarrass it by placing it in the necessity of refusing adhesion to a settlement which in form would be an agreement by both parties to the controversy, but which in fact would not have that great merit if on party was forced to submit to material injustice by threats of still greater calamities in default of submission.

"The President fully shares the view of the French and British Governments that the future of the world largely depends upon the right solution of this question, but he can not believe that a solution containing provisions which have already received the well-merited condemnation of the French and British Governments can in any sense be regarded as right. Neither can he share the opinion of the French and British Governments that the proposals contained in their memorandum delivered to the Yugoslav representatives on January 14th leave untouched practically every important point of the joint memorandum of the French, British, and American Governments of December 9, 1919, and that 'only two features undergo alterations, and both these alterations are to the positive advantage of Yugoslavia.' On the contrary, the President is of the opinion that the proposal of December 9th has been profoundly altered to the advantage of improper Italian objectives, to the serious injury of the Yugoslav people, and to the peril of world peace. The view that very positive advantages have been conceded to Italy would appear to be borne out by the fact that the Italian Government rejected the proposal of December 9th and accepted that of January 14th.

"The memorandum of December 9th rejected the device of connection Fiume with Italy by a narrow strip of coast territory as quite unworkable in practice, and as involving extraordinary complexities as regards customs control, coast guard services, and cognate matters in a territory of such unusual configuration. The French and British Governments, in association with the American Government, expressed the opinion that 'the plan appears to run counter to every consideration of geography, economics and territorial convenience.' The American Government notes that this annexation of Yugoslav territory by Italy is nevertheless agreed to by the memorandum of January 14th.

"The memorandum of December 9th rejected Italy's demand for the annexation of all of Istria, on the solid ground that neither strategic nor economic considerations could justify such annexation, and that there remained nothing in defense of the proposition save Italy's desire for more territory admittedly inhabited by Yugoslavs. The French and British Governments then expressed their cordial approval of the way in which the President had met every successive Italian demand for the absorption in Italy of territories inhabited by peoples not Italian and not in favor of being absorbed, and joined in the opinion that, 'it is neither just nor expedient to annex as the spoils of war territories inhabited by an alien race.' Yet this

unjust and inexpedient annexation of all of Istria is provided for in the memorandum of January 14th.

"The memorandum of December 9th carefully excluded every form of Italian sovereignty over Fiume. The American Government can not avoid the conclusion that the memorandum of January 14th opens the way for Italian control of Fiume's foreign affairs, thus introducing a measure of Italian sovereignty over, and Italian intervention in, the only practicable port of a neighboring people; and, taken in conjunction with the extension of Italian territory to the gates of Fiume, paves the way for possible future annexation of the port by Italy, in contradiction of compelling considerations of equity and right.

"The memorandum of December 9th afforded proper protection to the vital railway connecting Fiume northward with the interior. The memorandum of January 14th establishes Italy in dominating military positions close to the railway at a number of critical points.

"The memorandum of December 9th maintained in large measure the unity of the Albanian state. That of January 14th partitions the Albanian people, against their vehement protests, among three different alien powers.

"These and other provisions of the memorandum of January 14th, negotiated without the knowledge or approval of the American Government, change the whole face of the Adriatic settlement, and, in the eyes of this Government, render it unworkable and rob it of that measure of justice which is essential if this Government is to cooperate in maintaining its terms. The fact that the Yugoslav representatives might feel forced to accept, in the face of the alternative of the Treaty of London, a solution which appears to this Government so unfair in principle and so unworkable in practice, would not in any degree alter the conviction of this Government that it can not give its assent to a settlement which both in the terms of its provisions and in the methods of its enforcement constitutes a positive denial of the principles for which America entered the war.

"The matter would wear a very different aspect if there were any real divergence of opinion as to what constitutes a just settlement of the Adriatic issue. Happily no such divergence exists. The opinions of the French, British, and Americans as to a just and equitable territorial arrangement at the head of the Adriatic Sea were strikingly harmonious. Italy's unjust demands had been condemned by the French and British Governments in terms no less severe than those employed by the American Government. Certainly the French and British Governments will yield nothing to their American associate as regards the earnestness with which they have sought to convince the Italian Government that fulfillment of its demands would be contrary to Italy's own best interests, opposed to the spirit of justice in international dealings, and fraught with danger to the peace of Europe. In particular, the French and British Governments have opposed Italy's demands for specific advantages which it is now proposed to yield to her by the memorandum of January 14th, and have joined in informing the Italian Government that the concessions previously made 'afford to Italy full satisfaction of her historic national aspirations based on the desire to unite the Italian race, give her the absolute strategic control of the Adriatic, and offer her complete guarantees against whatever aggressions she might fear in the future from her Yugoslav neighbors.'

"While there is thus substantial agreement as to the injustice and inexpediency of Italy's claims, there is a difference of opinion as to how firmly Italy's friends should resist her importunate demands for alien territories to which she can present no valid title. It has seemed to the President that French and British associates of the American Government, in order to prevent the development of possibly dangerous complications in the Adriatic region, have felt constrained to go very far in yielding to demands which they have long opposed as unjust. The American Government, while no less generous in its desire to accord to Italy every advantage to which she could offer any proper claims, feels that it can not sacrifice the principles for which it entered the war to gratify the improper ambitions of one of its associates, or to purchase a temporary appearance of calm in the Adriatic at the price of a future world conflagration. It is unwilling to recognize either an unjust settlement based on a secret treaty the terms of which are inconsistent with the new world conditions, or an unjust settlement arrived at by employing that secret treaty as an instrument of coercion. It would welcome any solution of the problem based on a free and unprejudiced consideration of the merits of the controversy; or on terms of which the disinterested Great Powers agreed to be just and equitable; Italy, however, has repeatedly rejected such solutions. This Government can not accept a settlement the terms of which have been admitted to be unwise and unjust, but which it is proposed to grant to Italy in view of her persistent refusal to accept any wise and just solution.

"It is a time to speak with the utmost frankness. The Adriatic issue as it now presents itself raises the fundamental question as to whether the American Government can on any terms cooperate with its European associates in the great work of maintaining the peace of the world by removing the primary causes of war. This Government does not doubt its ability to reach amicable understandings with the Associated Governments as to what constitutes equity and justice in international dealings; for differences of opinion as to the best methods of applying just principles have never obscured the vital fact that in the main the several governments have entertained the same fundamental conception of what those principles are. But if substantial agreement on what is just and reasonable is not to determine international issues; if the country possessing the most endurance in pressing its demands rather than the country armed with a just cause is to gain the support of the powers; if forcible seizure of coveted areas is to be permitted and condoned, and is to receive ultimate justification by creating a situation so difficult that decision favorable to the aggressor is deemed a practical necessity; if deliberately incited ambition is, under the name of national sentiment, to be rewarded at the expense of the small and the weak; if, in a word, the old order of things which brought so many evils on the world is still to prevail, then the time is not yet come when this Government can enter a concert of powers the very existence of which must depend upon a new spirit and a new order. The American people are willing to share in such high enterprise; but many among them are fearful lest they become entangled in international policies and committed to international obligations foreign alike to their ideals and their traditions. To commit them to such a policy

as that embodied in the latest Adriatic proposals, and to obligate them to maintain injustice as against the claims of justice, would be to provide the most solid ground for such fears. This Government can undertake no such grave responsibility.

"The President desires to say that if it does not appear feasible to secure acceptance of the just and generous concessions offered by memorandum of those powers of December 9th, 1919, which the the British, French, and American Governments to Italy in the joint President has already clearly stated to be the maximum concession that the Government of the United States can offer, the President desires to say that he must take under serious consideration the withdrawal of the treaty with Germany and the agreement between the United States and France of June 28, 1919, which are now before the Senate and permitting the terms of the European settlement to be independently established and enforced by the Associated Governments.

(Signed) "LANSING."

REPLY OF THE FRENCH AND BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS OF
FEBRUARY 17.

The text of the memorandum signed by the Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain in reply to President Wilson's communication of February 10 reads as follows:

"LONDON, *February 17, 1920.*

"The Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain have given their earnest attention to the communication made to them in regard to the Adriatic settlement on behalf of President Wilson; they are glad that the Government of the United States has set forth its views so fully and with such complete frankness; they do not, however, find it altogether easy to understand the steps by which the Government of the United States has arrived at its present attitude.

"In the first place they believe that there is no foundation for the assumption which underlies the American communication that the proposed settlement outlined in their telegram of January 20 involves a capitulation to the Italian point of view as opposed to the Yugo-Slav and therefore constitutes a settlement with which the Government of the United States can have nothing to do. The memorandum from the United States Government criticises the proposed settlement on four grounds.

"Firstly, that it cedes to Italy the narrow strip of territory running along the coast as far as the *Corpus Separatum* of Fiume.

"Secondly, that this strip of territory coupled with the constitution of Fiume as a Free city, under the guarantee of the League of Nations clearly paves the way for its annexation to Italy.

"Thirdly, that the modification of the Yugo-Slav-Italian frontier operates to the detriment of Yugo-Slavia in its control of the northern railway from Fiume and;

"Fourthly, that it provides for the partition of Albania. The memorandum of the Government of the United States would appear to have entirely ignored the great advantage conferred on Yugo-Slavia at the same time.

"The origin of the proposal of January 20 lies in the fact that when the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and France came to deal directly,

both with the representatives of Italy and Yugo-Slavia in Paris, they found that nobody desired to protect Free State of Fiume, which had always been an essential part of the American proposals for settlement. They discovered that Yugo-Slavia would approve settlement which did away with the Free State including, as it does, a population of 200,000 Slavs and included as much as possible of its territory and population within its own borders. Accordingly the Governments of France and Great Britain continuing the negotiations from the point at which they had been left on December 7, made the proposal, under discussion, including the rectification of the Wilson Line and the cession to Italy of a strip of territory running along the shore so as to connect it with the Free City of Fiume. The net upshot of which was that Yugo-Slavia was to gain as compared with the American proposal an additional 150,000 Yugo-Slavs. While agreeing to the inclusion within the Italian frontier of a further 50,000 Yugo-Slavs in addition to the 400,000 which President Wilson had already agreed to allot to that country.

"As regards the suggestion that the proposal of January 20 clearly paved the way for the annexation of the town of Fiume to Italy, the French and British Governments cannot possibly accept the implication that the guarantee of the League of Nations is worthless and that the Italian Government has no intention of abiding by a Treaty which it enters into. As regards the railway, the proposal of January 20 gives to the Yugo-Slav state the control of the whole line from the point where it leaves the port of Fiume, which is under the control of the League of Nations. This railway is a commercial and not a strategic railway. Under President Wilson's proposals it is commanded by Italian guns. According to either plan nothing could be easier than for Italy to cut it in the event of war. They do not, therefore, see that there is substance in this criticism, a proposal whose real effect is to transfer the whole railway to Yugo-Slavia instead of leaving it in the hands of the Free City of Fiume which no one desires.

"There remains the question of Albania. They are glad to receive the criticism of the American Government on this part of their proposal. They would point out, however, that their telegram of January 20 states that 'The details of the administration of this country by Yugo-Slavia, Italy, and Greece have yet to be elaborated and in working to this end sight will not be lost of the feelings and future interest of the Albanian people, and every endeavor will be made to carry out the arrangements in full consultation with them.' Further, they would point out that so far from this proposal being made in the interests of Italy it was made in the interests of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs pointed out that though under the proposal of January 20 the northern part of their territory was guaranteed adequate access to the sea through the port of Fiume, the southern part of Yugo-Slavia had no such access and that the national outlet was to build a line down the Drin River to the mouth of the Boyana River. The French and British Governments thought that there was force in this contention, and their proposal in regard to Albania was designed to enable Yugo-Slavia, inasmuch as Albania was unable to undertake the work for itself, to develop, under international guarantee, a railway, have never been able to establish a settled government for themselves, and as the northern part of the population is overwhelmingly

Christian and the southern part similarly Mohammedan they thought it best to entrust the responsibility for government and development of these two parts to Yugo-Slavia and Italy, respectively. They have, however, agreed that the whole of Albania should be brought under the mandatory system, and they believe that this will make it possible eventually to satisfy aspirations of the Albanian people for unity and self-government.

"The Governments of Great Britain and France therefore must repeat that they find difficulty in understanding the present attitude of the United States Government towards the proposals and they hope that in view of these explanations that Government will see its way to reconsider its attitude. In their view, these proposals are the natural outcome of the policy of the joint memorandum of December 9, once, with the consent of both parties concerned, the idea of the Free State of Fiume was abandoned in view of the absence of the American representatives they had no option but to attempt to settle this question by themselves. It is not, however, the desire of the two governments to force a settlement which is unacceptable to the President of the United States, and they will therefore not attempt to insist upon its acceptance until they have heard the view of the United States Government on this dispatch. They have confined themselves, therefore, to asking the Yugo-Slav Government to give a definite answer to their memorandum of January 20, since they must know what the attitude of that Government is.

"They feel bound, however, to ask the United States Government to consider the effect of their action. The proposal of December ninth has fallen to the ground because nobody now wants to set up the artificial Free State of Fiume. The proposal of January twentieth is objected to by the United States, which had no representative at the deliberations and which cannot therefore be in close touch with the changes of opinion and circumstances which have taken place since its plenipotentiaries returned to America. They cannot help feeling that a large part of the misunderstanding is attributable to the difficulty of reaching a common understanding. In such circumstances how does the United States Government, which, to the regret of the Allies, still has no plenipotentiaries at the conference, propose that this dispute, which prevents the reconstruction and threatens the peace of southeastern Europe and whose settlement is urgently required, should ever be closed?

"Further, the British and French Governments must point out that the fears to secure an agreed settlement between Italy and Jugoslavia must leave them no choice but to acknowledge the validity of the Treaty of London, they would recall to the United States Government that the Treaty of London was entered into in the spring of 1915, at a most critical and dangerous moment of the war. In thus entering the war on the side of human freedom, Italy made a condition that the Allies should secure for her, as against Austria-Hungary, strategic frontiers which would guarantee her (?) retention by the Central Powers of the strategic command of the northern plains of Italy had the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained in existence as the ally of Germany the provisions of the Treaty of London would have been sound. Relying upon the word of her allies, Italy endured the war to the end. She suffered a loss in killed of over 500,000 men, and in wounded of three times that number, while her

people are burdened by crushing debt. It was clearly impossible for her allies to declare at the end of the war that their signature to the treaty meant nothing but a scrap of paper and that they did not intend to apply the *time* their bond. They agreed with President Wilson that these circumstances under which the Treaty of London were concluded had been transformed by the war itself, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had disappeared and the menace to Italy against which the terms of the treaty were intended to provide had largely diminished. They therefore entirely associated themselves with the efforts of President Wilson to negotiate a settlement between Italy and Yugo-Slavia which would be consonant with the new conditions and which was acceptable to both sides. But throughout these proposals they never concealed from him the fact that they regarded themselves as bound by the Treaty of London, in the event of a voluntary agreement not being arrived at. The fact, therefore, that when they made their proposals of January 20 they informed both the Italian and the Yugo-Slav Governments that, in the event of their not being accepted, they would have no option but to allow the Treaty of London to come into force, can have come as no surprise, and was indeed the obvious method of bringing this long controversy to a close. They would point out that this declaration is not, as the American Government would appear to think, an ultimatum to Yugo-Slav on behalf of Italy. Under the Treaty of London, Italy has had to abandon Fiume altogether and hand it over to Yugo-Slav. This part of the Treaty is as unacceptable to Italians as is the transfer of Dalmatia and the islands to Yugo-Slav. The declaration, therefore, in regard to the enforcement of the Treaty was an attempt to promote a prompt settlement of this dangerous controversy by pointing out to both sides that if they could not agree upon a settlement, which after long negotiation seemed to be a fair compromise between their conflicting views, the only alternative was an arrangement which was less palatable to both.

"Finally, the Governments of France and Great Britain feel bound to reply to the general observations contained in the latter part of the United States' memorandum. They know well the sincerity of President Wilson's desire for the establishment order providing real guarantees against a repetition of the terrible events of the last five years. They are reluctant to believe that the President can consider that the modifications which they have made in the memorandum of December ninth can constitute in themselves a justification for a withdrawal from all further cooperation with them in the attempt to adjust peaceably the world's affairs. They feel confident that the explanations contained in this reply will remove any misunderstandings as to the nature of the Adriatic proposals. At the same time they are deeply concerned that the United States should even contemplate the action to which they refer. One of the principal difficulties encountered by the Heads of Governments during the negotiations of peace was that of reconciling treaty obligations with national aspirations which had changed or come into being since the date on which the treaties were signed. It was obviously impossible to ignore these latter aspirations, many of them born during the war, and formulated with unexampled clarity and elevation by the President of the United States himself. It was equally clearly impossible to ignore treaties, in fact the war

began in order to enforce upon Germany respect for the solemn treaty she had made nearly eighty years before in regard to the neutrality of Belgium. It is the task of the statesmen of the world to endeavor to adjust national aspirations and ideals, many of which are only transitory and ephemeral with one another and with international treaties. The difficulty of the task, the patience required in order to effect it successfully, the uselessness of endeavoring to enforce preconceived ideas on refractory material has been recognized by the one more clearly than the other and in his address at the opening session of the Peace Conference he pointed out how impossible it was to expect imperfect human beings and imperfect nations to agree at once upon ideal solutions. He made it clear that in his judgment the only course before the Peace Conference was to do the best it could in the circumstances and to create machinery whereby improvements and rectifications could be effected by reason and common sense under the authority of the League of Nations instead of by resort to war.

"Accordingly, not only was the League of Nations established, but Article Nine was specially inserted in the Covenant providing that the Assembly may from time to time advise us of reconsideration by members of the League of treaties which become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world, thus an essential part of the Treaties of Peace has been the constitution of machinery for modifying and correcting those treaties themselves where experience shows it to be necessary. The Governments of France and Great Britain, therefore, view with consternation the threat of the United States Government to withdraw from the comity of nations because it does not agree with the precise terms of the Adriatic settlement. The difficulty of reconciling ethnographic with other considerations is certainly not greater in the Adriatic case and does not produce more anomalous results than in the case of other parts of the general treaties of peace difficulties which were recognized by President Wilson and his colleagues where they agreed to the best settlement practicable at the time because their machinery for peaceful readjustment had come into being; also ethnologic reasons cannot be the only ones to be taken into account is clearly shown by the inclusion of three million Germans in Czecho-Slovakia and the proposals so actively supported by the United States delegation for the inclusion within Poland of great Ruthenian majorities, exceeding three million five hundred thousand in number, to Polish rule. Though the British representatives saw serious objections to this arrangement, the British Government have not thought themselves justified in reconsidering on that account their membership in the League of Nations. The Governments of France and Great Britain therefore earnestly trust that whatever the final view of the United States Government as to the Adriatic settlement may be they will not wreck the whole machinery for dealing with international disputes by withdrawing from the treaties of 1919 because their view is not adopted in this particular case. That would be to destroy the hopes now entertained by countless millions of people all over the world that the most enduring and most beneficent part of the Treaty of Peace was the constitution of machinery whereby the defects of treaties could be remedied and that changing conditions and requirements of man-

kind could be adjusted by processes of reason and justice instead of by the balancing of armaments and resort to war. The Governments of France and Great Britain cannot believe that it is the purpose of the American people to take a step so far-reaching and terrible in its effects on a ground which has the appearance of being so inadequate."

"D. LLOYD-GEORGE."

"MILLERAND."

"DAVIS."

PRESIDENT WILSON'S NOTE OF FEBRUARY 24.

The following is the text of the President's note of February 24th sent in reply to the joint memorandum of February 17 of the Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain:

"WASHINGTON, February 24, 1920.

"The joint memorandum of February 17 of the Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain has received the careful and earnest consideration of the President. He has no desire whatever to criticize the attitude of the Governments of France and Great Britain concerning the Adriatic settlement, but feels that in the present circumstances he has no choice but to maintain the position he has all along taken as regards that settlement. He believes it to be the central principle fought for in the war that no government or group of governments has the right to dispose of the territory or to determine the political allegiance of any free people. The five great powers, though the Government of the United States constitutes one of them, have in his conviction no more right than had the Austrian Government to dispose of the free Jugoslavic peoples without the free consent and cooperation of those peoples. The President's position is that the powers associated against Germany gave final and irrefutable proof of their sincerity in the war by writing into the Treaty of Versailles Article X of the covenant of the League of Nations which constitutes an assurance that all the great powers have done what they have compelled Germany to do—have foregone all territorial aggression and all interference with the free political self-determination of the peoples of the world. With this principle lived up to, permanent peace is secured and the supreme object of the recent conflict has been achieved. Justice and self-determination have been substituted for aggression and political dictation. Without it, there is no security for any nation that conscientiously adheres to a nonmilitaristic policy. The object of the war, as the Government of the United States understands it, was to free Europe from that cloud of anxiety which had hung over it for generations because of the constant threat of the use of military force by one of the most powerful governments of the Continent, and the President feels it important to say again that in the opinion of the American Government the terms of the peace settlement must continue to be formulated upon the basis of the principles for which America entered the war. It is in a spirit of cooperation, therefore, and of desire for mutual understanding that the President reviews the various considerations which the French and British Prime Ministers have emphasized in their memorandum of February 17. He is

confident that they will not mistake his motives in undertaking to make plain what he feels to be the necessary conclusions from their statements.

"The President notes that the objections of the Italians and Jugoslavs were made the basis for discarding the project of the Free State of Fiume. It would seem to follow, therefore, that the joint consent of these two powers should have been required for the substitute project. The consent of Italy has been obtained. He does not find, however, that the Jugoslavs have also expressed a willingness to accept the substitute plan. Are they to be required now to accept a proposal which is more unsatisfactory because they have raised objections to the solution proposed by the British, French, and American Government in the memorandum of December 9? The President would, of course, make no objection to a settlement mutually agreeable to Italy and Jugoslavia regarding their common frontier in the Fiume region provided that such an agreement is not made on the basis of compensations elsewhere at the expense of nationals of a third power. His willingness to accept such proposed joint agreement of Italy and Jugoslavia is based on the fact that only their own nationals are involved. In consequence, the results of direct negotiations of the two interested powers would fall within the scope of the principle of self-determination. Failing in this, both parties should be willing to accept a decision of the Governments of Great Britain, France, and the United States.

"The British and French Governments appear to find in the President's suggestion that the latest proposals would pave the way for the annexation of the city of Fiume, an implication that the guarantee of the League of Nations is worthless and that the Italian Government does not intend to abide by a treaty into which it has entered. The President can not but regard this implication as without basis and as contrary to his thought. In his view the proposal to connect Fiume with Italy by a narrow strip of coast territory is quite impracticable. As he has already said, it involves extraordinary complexities in customs control, coast guard services, and other related matters, and he is unable to detach himself from the previous views of the British and French Governments, as expressed jointly with the American Government in the memorandum of December 9, that 'the plan appears to run counter to every consideration of geography, economics, and territorial convenience.' He further believes that to have Italian territory join Fiume would be invite to strife out of which annexation might issue. Therefore, in undertaking to shape the solution so as to prevent this he is acting on the principle that each part of the final settlement should be based upon the essential justice of that particular case. This was one of the principles adopted by the Allied and Associated Powers as a basis for treaty making. To it has been added the provisions of the League of Nations, but it has never been the policy of either this Government or its associates to invoke the League of Nations as a guarantee that a bad settlement shall not become worse. The sum of such actions would of necessity destroy faith in the League and eventually the League itself.

"The President notes with satisfaction that the Governments of Great Britain and France will not lose sight of the future interests and well-being of the Albanian peoples. The American Government quite understands that the threefold division of Albania in the British-

French agreement might be most acceptable to the Yugoslav Government, but it is just as vigorously opposed to injuring the Albanian people for the benefit of Yugoslavia as it is opposed to injuring the Yugoslav people for the benefit of Italy. It believes that the differences between the Christian and Mohammedan populations will be increased by putting the two sections under the control of nations of unlike language, government, and economic strength. Moreover, one part would be administered by the Italian Government which is represented on the Council of the League, the other part by the Yugoslav Government which has no such representation. Therefore, to alter or withdraw the mandate at some future time would be well-nigh impossible.

“Regarding the Treaty of London, the French and British Prime Ministers will appreciate that the American Government must hesitate to speak with assurance since it is a matter in which the French and British Governments can alone judge their obligations and determine their policies. But the President feels that it is not improper to recall a few of the arguments which have already been advanced against this treaty, namely, the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, the secret character of the treaty, and its opposition to the principles unanimously accepted as the basis for making peace. In addition he desires to submit certain further considerations. In the northern Italian frontiers agreements have already been reached which depart from the Treaty of London line and which were made with the understanding that negotiations were proceeding on quite a new basis. It has been no secret that the parties to the treaty did not themselves now desire it and that they have thus far refrained from putting its provisions into effect. In mutually disregarding their secret treaty commitments, the parties to the treaty have recognized the change in circumstances that has taken place in the interval between the signing of the secret treaty and its proposed execution at the present time. For nearly eight months, discussion of the Adriatic problem has proceeded on the assumption that a better basis for an understanding could be found than those provided by the Treaty of London. The greater part of the resulting proposals have already received Italy's assent. These proposals in some cases affected territory beyond the Treaty of London line, as in the Tarvis and Sexton Valleys; in others, the territory fell short of the Treaty of London line, as in the case of the islands of Lussin, Unie, Lissa, and Pelagosa—to mention only a few of the many proposals upon which tentative agreements have long been reached and which would be upset by an application of the treaty at this late day.

“The coupling of the treaty of London as an obligatory alternative to the Adriatic settlement proposed on January 14 came as a surprise to the American Government because this Government had already by the agreement of December 9 entered into a distinct understanding with the British and French Governments regarding the basis of a settlement of the question. By their action of January 14 the Government of the United States was confronted with a definitive solution, to which was added on January 20 a threat to fall back upon the terms of the treaty of London. This course was followed without any attempt to seek the views of this Government or to provide

such opportunity of discussion as was easily arranged in many other matters dealt with in the same period.

"The President notes that the memorandum of February 17 refers to the difficulty of reconciling ethnographic with other considerations in making territorial adjustments, and cites the inclusion of three million Germans in Czechoslovakia and more than three million Ruthenes in Poland as examples of necessary modifications of ethnographic frontiers. He feels compelled to observe that this is a line of reasoning which the Italian representatives have advanced during the course of negotiations, but which the British and French have hitherto found themselves unable to accept. There were cases where for sufficient geographical and economic reasons slight deflections of the ethnographical frontier were sanctioned by the Conference, and the American Government believes that if Italy would consent to apply the same principles in Istria and Dalmatia, the Adriatic question would not exist.

"The American Government heartily subscribes to the sentiments expressed by the Governments of Great Britain and France regarding Italy's participation in the war. It fully appreciates the vital consequences of her participation and is profoundly grateful for her heroic sacrifices. These sentiments have been repeatedly expressed by the American Government. But such considerations can not be made the reason for unjust settlements which will be provocative of future wars. A course thus determined would be shortsighted and not in accord with the terrible sacrifices of the entire world, which can be justified and ennobled only by leading finally to settlements in keeping with the principles for which the war was fought. The President asks that the Prime Ministers of France, Great Britain, and Italy will read his determination in the Adriatic matter in the light of these principles and settlements and will realize that standing upon such a foundation of principle he must of necessity maintain the position which he arrived at after months of earnest consideration. He confidently counts upon their cooperation in this effort on his part to maintain for the Allied and Associated Powers that direction of affairs which was initiated by the victory over Germany and the Peace Conference at Paris.

"POLK, *Acting.*"

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